

# One Publishes to Find Comrades\*

Eva Weinmayr

Before London's notorious right-wing newspaper Evening Standard was sold to a Russian Oligarch in 2009, it used to publish three editions a day, a practice ceased by now. The first edition left the printing plant just before lunchtime, followed by one in the afternoon and a late "West End Final" edition available only in central London. Alongside each edition the newspaper's drivers dropped a poster at the newsstands, the "splash", as they called it, advertising the latest front-page headline of the paper.

A few of them read like:

Venus crosses the sun  
 Rock star splits from young lover  
 Man beheaded in street  
 Cigarettes, beer, wine, up  
 Comic legend dies  
 Army: we must go within days  
 Brown gives cash to all

The poster slogans do not give away full information and merely act like teasers promising more detail in the paper. Their sole purpose is to get you buying the newspaper. The posters also exude a sense of poetry. Like Japanese haikus they shrink complex realities into three or four lines – loaded with emotion. Carefully and ambiguously worded, they are pushing for drama and a raised level of adrenaline.

They also have a punchy visual impact – partly because they employ a particular nib-pen writing with an authoritative look. When studying the letters closely, you can tell, that 99% of the posters in circulation are written by one and the same person.

With the help of London based artist publishing house Book Works, who published my archive of the newsstand posters in a book<sup>1</sup>, I was able to meet Pat, the man whose handwriting most Londoners are familiar with. Here in the Evening Standard's bill room at their headquarters in Canada Water in London, he used to write day by day with a black marker pen the master poster, which subsequently got multiplied on an instant offset press for immediate delivery to the newsstands.



Evening Standard Poster

1 Eva Weinmayr, "Suitcase Body Is Missing Woman", published by Book Works, London, 2005



Bill Room at Evening Standard headquarters, Canada Water, London, 2005

What does the handwriting do? It suggests directness and immediacy making us speculate that there is no time between the news happening and the news being reported – no time to use a computerized production process. IT JUST HAPPENED – and needed writing down. This act of personalizing the anonymous news splashes makes the commotion the posters are meant to create even more powerful.

The event here is not the news itself. On the contrary. The actual event is triggered by a strategically worded and placed three-line banner raising interest, curiosity and adrenaline and eventually generating a return for the newspaper publisher.

Posters claim attention – at a distance. They are visually aggressive, says Susan Sontag comparing the nature of public notices with that of posters: "A public notice aims to inform or command. A poster aims to seduce, to exhort, to sell, to educate, to convince, to appeal.

Whereas a public notice distributes information to interested or alert citizens, a poster reaches out to grab those who might otherwise pass it by. Posters are aggressive because they appear in the context of other posters. [...] The form of the poster depends on the fact that many posters exist – competing with (and sometimes reinforcing) each other. Thus posters also presuppose the modern concept of public space – as a theater of persuasion."<sup>2</sup>

Let's look at the performativity the poster or more general printed matter can develop. Since the 1960s the Museum of Modern Art library<sup>3</sup>

2 Susan Sontag, "Posters: Advertisement, Art, Political Artifact, Commodity". In Looking Closer 3, Michael Bierut, ed. (Allworth Press, New York, 1999), pp.196–218.

3 "Please come to the Show", two-part exhibition at MoMA New York, curated by David Senior, 2013



Evening Standard Poster

in New York is collecting innovative printed invitations, small posters, and flyers. These ephemera hold specific material qualities – for instance a certain paper, colour, weight, a specific size, design – and as such act as a predefining mechanism to shape our actual visiting experience of the exhibition or event they announce. They become an integral part of the work itself they invite us to: conceptual works, installations, performances, and other time based events and screenings.

But most importantly – they also act as currency. Carefully circulated with consideration by hand or by mail they authorize you to join the event. This is of particular interest today as we realize that the phenomenon of printed invitations

has shifted more and more towards the digital such as email flyers, 140-character tweets and networked facebook posts.

Both the lives of Evening Standard posters as well as the “invites as currency” depend crucially upon our attention as their addressees. We are looking at the moment, where the posters leave a printer, become distributed and enter circulation. Now, and only now, they meet us – their public. It is exactly here, that they start their mission. In one of his early issues of Control Magazine Stephen Willats states that the artwork is completely dependent to have an audience. “We could almost say viewers are its reason for being, without them it doesn’t exist.”<sup>4</sup>



Massacre on St. Valentine's Day. New York: Liberty, Equality and Freedom for Female Artists, 1985.

<sup>4</sup> Stephen Willats, Control Magazine 1965 – ongoing



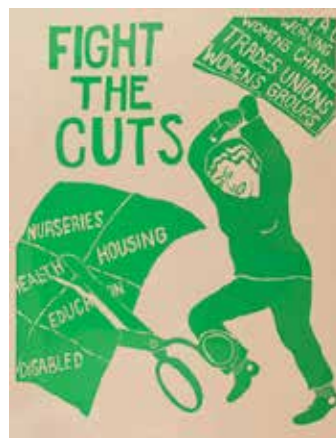
Let us examine in more detail what happens before (and after) this moment of going public. Let us not look at publishing as the end of a process during which consolidated thoughts and enquiries are put into a final brochure, book or leaflet. Let us look at publishing more as a way to initiate a social process, a social space, where meaning is collectively established in the collaborative creation of a publication. From this perspective, all of a sudden publishing is not a document of pre-defined cognitions. Publishing becomes a tool to *make* discoveries.

For the See Red feminist silk-screen poster collective, for example, which started in London in 1974 working collectively was central.

“In the early days the posters were mainly produced about our own personal experiences as women, about the oppression of housework, childcare and the negative image of women. An idea for a poster would be discussed in the group, a member would work on a design, bring it back for comment, someone else might make changes and so on until the collective was satisfied with the end result; no one individually took the credit. This was a concept many in the art world found hard to accept: ‘who holds the pencil? Someone must hold the pencil!’”<sup>5</sup>

The collective of women got together to combat the negative image of the women in advertising and the media. See Red posters, which convey a particular sharpness and wit, seem to attract further attention and are included in several recent and future exhibitions.<sup>6,7</sup>

Suzy Mackie and Pru Stevenson, founding members of the See Red Women’s Workshop recently gave a talk at The Showroom in London and stressed how important it was to gather in person and generate ideas about how to visualize a particular issue that was important to them. It was the activity of articulating experiences and collective brainstorming and the discussion of ideas that lead to sharp slogans and imagery for the posters.<sup>8</sup>



Poster by See Red

5 Suzy Mackie and Pru Stevenson, founding members of See Red write on their blog <http://www.seeredwomensworkshop.wordpress.com>

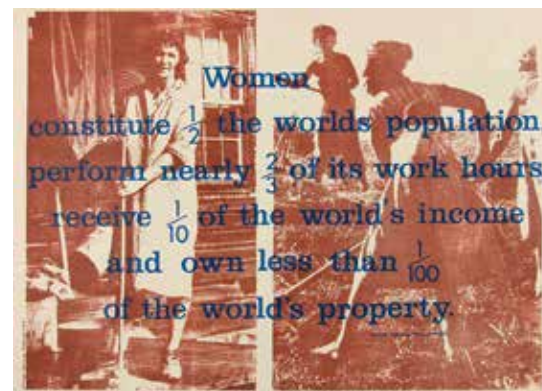
6 “A World to Win: Posters of Protest and Revolution”, Victoria & Albert Museum, London, 1 May 2014–2 Nov 2014 and “See Red Women’s Workshop” exhibition ICA London, 5 December 2012–13 January 2013

7 This is partly due to Jess Baines’ research into Radical Printshop Collectives that proliferated in the UK in the 1970s and 80s. Read “Free Radicals” on <http://www.afterall.org/online/radical.printmaking#.U0FRYcflCfw>

They shared skills and knowledge about how to prepare and screen print. As important as the subject matter itself, was the physical process of making these very specific objects. The creation becomes as important as putting them to the public.

The actual event occurs at the moment of production as much as of circulation. It is about the experience of the reader, as much as the experience of the producer and the impact such encounters generate for participants during the process of making.

The Glasgow based artist Ciara Phillips experiments with approaches how such models can be rethought today. In her recent project “Workshop 2011 – ongoing”<sup>9</sup>, she worked with members of Justice for Domestic Workers<sup>10</sup>, an organization formed by migrant domestic workers in the UK trying “to politicize the domestic sphere as a site of labour, exchange and power relations”<sup>11</sup>. They shed light on the precarious status of domestic workers in private



Poster by See Red



Poster by See Red

8 “Posters, good posters at any rate, cannot be considered mainly as instruments for communicating something whose normative form is “information”. Indeed, it is precisely on this point that a poster differs generically from a public notice – and enters the territory of art. Unlike the public notice, whose function is unambiguously to say something the poster is not concerned ultimately with anything so clear or unequivocal. The point of the poster may be its “message”: the advertisement, the announcement, the slogan. But what is recognized as an effective poster is one that transcends its utility in delivering that message. Unlike the public notice, the poster (despite its frankly commercial origins) is not just utilitarian.” In Susan Sontag, “Posters: Advertisement, Art, Political Artifact, Commodity”. In Looking Closer 3, Michael Bierut, ed. (Allworth Press, New York, 1999), pp.196–218.

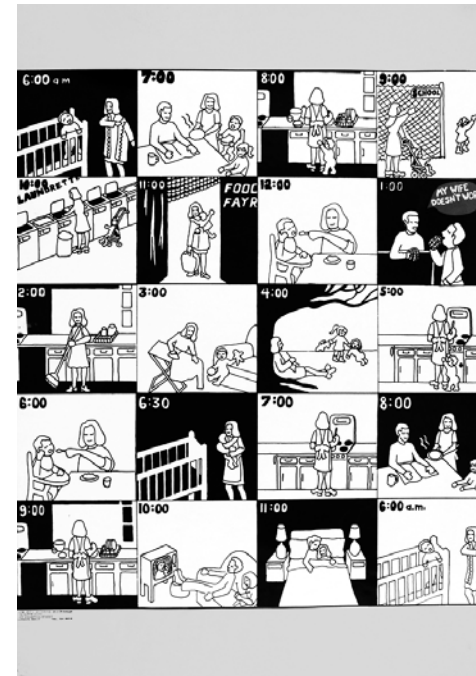
9 Ciara Phillips: Workshop (2010–ongoing), 2 Oct–30 Nov 2013 at the Showroom, London

10 Justice for Domestic Workers campaign, <http://www.j4dw.org/>

11 Read more on [www.theshowroom.org](http://www.theshowroom.org)



Poster by See Red



Poster by See Red



Ciara Phillips, "Workshop, 2011 - ongoing",  
The Showroom, London



households and campaign for fundamental protection and formal recognition of their work under UK employment law – including the right to take legal action against abusive employers. Because the campaign’s members are coming from different backgrounds and languages visual expression is key: In monthly sessions they create their slogans and messages using creative processes such as painting and collage to communicate to themselves and – only in a second step – to the wider public.

This specific approach to collective publishing was the starting point for a workshop I ran with students and tutors at the Ontario College of Art and Design in Toronto. Within 24 hours we, as a group, created an *Instant Publication*, from briefing and discussing initial ideas, to actual work, graphic design, proofing, printing and subsequently launching the outcome the very same night at Art Metropole in Toronto. Taking place in the Zine library of OCAD under a gazebo around a campfire this short experiment in collaborative practice created an adventurous space for social encounters in a more and more prescribed learning environment of today’s art colleges.

Coming back to André Breton’s “One Publishes to find Comrades” I’d like to think of printed publications, posters or zines as not necessarily the end product trying to convince anyone of anything, but rather as “working towards establishing conditions for the co-production of meaning.”<sup>12</sup> In the publishing classes I run as part of AND Publishing<sup>13</sup> we try to establish a social



Poster by See Red

12 “Toward an Insurrection of the Published? Ten Thoughts on Ticks & Comrades”, <http://nihilistoptimism.blogspot.co.uk>, retrieved 4 April 2014

13 AND, is an experimental publishing platform exploring digital technologies and new forms of dissemination. Whether photocopied or gloss printed, we define digital print-on-demand as a tool to directly interact with the reader. Thanks to short print runs (starting from one copy) and low production costs, we can sustain an adventurous and inquiring creative practice without having to conform to the mass market. We’re also developing AND Public, a unique print-on-demand facility for self-publishing which allows artists to publish and distribute their own work. AND is run by Eva Weinmayr, Lynn Harris and Andrea Francke. ([www.andpublishing.org](http://www.andpublishing.org))

process where issues and ideas can be articulated and acted upon, where skills are exchanged and knowledge co-produced – in public. Actually AND also tests the implications of such co-operative models.

How can we create a horizontal model of communication between artist and audience, a less ownership-based notion of authorship? “A growing number of artists and artist collectives, challenging the artist’s expert-like authority, have come to advocate co-authorship, broadening responsibility for the creative process to all those taking part;”<sup>14</sup> explains Stephen Wright whose recently published reader “Toward a Lexicon of Usership” has massively enriched the discussion. “Usership represents a radical challenge to at least three stalwart conceptual institutions in contemporary culture: spectatorship, expert culture, and ownership”.<sup>15</sup>

This is where publishing becomes a political act: “It is imperative that we publish” says Matthew Stadler, “not only as a means to counter the influence of a hegemonic ‘public’, but also to reclaim the space in which we imagine ourselves and our collectivity.”<sup>16</sup>

\* This declaration was made by André Breton in 1920, quoted by Gareth Branwyn “Jamming the Media: A Citizen’s Guide Reclaiming The Tools of Communication”. Vancouver: Chronicle Books, 1997



AND Publishing “Working in the Edges”, workshop & book launch, The Showroom, London, 2014



Eva Weinmayr & Shannon Gerard: Instant publication, Ontario College of Art and Design, Toronto, 2012

14 Stephen Wright, “Users and Usership of Art: Challenging Expert Culture”, <http://transform.eipcp.net/correspondence/1180961069>, retrieved 4 April 2014

15 Stephen Wright “Toward a Lexicon of Usership”, Van Abbe Museum, 2013. Download PDF on [museumarteutil.net](http://museumarteutil.net)

16 Matthew Stadler is founder of Publication Studio, a print-on-demand publishing house in Portland Oregon. See Wikipedia Matthew Stadler, What is Publication? Montehermoso art center, Vitoria, Spain, Suddenly.org, 9/27/08.